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McManus and Birkholz Fight to Protect Michigan Waters

Work together to ensure funding of water quality programs

LANSING – Senators Michelle McManus and Patty Birkholz today announced the Senate Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs Committee passage of important new water quality fees for the federally required state water pollution control program, called the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES).

"The fees create a source of funding to help Michigan protect the waters of our state from pollution by meeting our obligation to process NPDES permit applications," said McManus, R-Lake Leelanau. "The new revenue represents a significant policy development in the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) as water quality programs will no longer be completely dependent on general fund dollars."

Sen. McManus, Chair of the Senate Appropriation's Subcommittee for the DEQ budget, included \$3.1 million in new revenue for the DEQ's water quality division. The new NPDES fees would range from \$400 to \$8,775 for corporate permits and from \$451 to \$62,000 for municipal permits. Nearly \$2 million of the revenue was designated from the general fund.

Funding for the NPDES permits will be derived in part from the Single Business Tax currently paid by businesses for the regulation of licenses and permits.

"In a time when Michigan is cutting budgets to fund critical programs and ensure that our fiscal house is in order, the DEQ budget for protecting water quality will remain fully funded," McManus said. "I think this represents a significant victory for our natural resources."

Sen. Birkholz, R-Saugatuck Township, Chair of the Senate Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs Committee, also acknowledged the significance of the new water quality revenue in the DEQ budget. The Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs committee passed legislation on June 12 to establish NPDES fees and improve water quality programs in Michigan.

"Funding critical water quality programs is a priority of the Senate and the state," Birkholz said. "Using fees to supplement the general fund dollars in the fight to stop water pollution is a substantial step forward to ensuring the quality of our waters."

Through their leadership, Birkholz and McManus were able to increase the funding level for water quality programs from the 2002 budget and maintain the funding level set for the 2003 budget.

The 2002 DEQ annual report announced that Michigan's water quality is better than it has been in several years as a result of the Legislature and the Administration working together to preserve our natural resources.